Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

1. Describe the need for cultural and behavioral change within the emergency services relating to safety, incorporating leadership, supervision, accountability and personal responsibility.
2. Explain the need for enhancements of personal and organizational accountability for health and safety.
3. Identify the 16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives.
4. Demonstrate a general knowledge about the roles and responsibilities that individuals and organizations have to ensure safety.

Unit Lesson

The fire and emergency services include paid firefighters, volunteers, or a combination of fire personnel that respond to both medical and fire emergencies. Regardless of what type of firefighter is on the street, a high level of respect is seen from community members and stakeholders. The terrorist attacks on 911 drew attention to the type of work, dangers, and fire traditions that are experienced by firefighters. The type of respect shown by the public and community stakeholders has given a new form of environment, or culture, to the fire service. Culture, for the purposes of this lecture and chapter, refers to the sets of tradition, procedures, norms, attitudes, behaviors, and demographics that are shared between the community and fire service. On the other hand, there are traditions that are found within the fire service instilled for more than a century. A tradition is an act, action, policy, or procedure that is handed down from one generation to another based on the organizational culture identity that is present. Three types of traditions exist in the fire service: broad fire and emergency services, policy based traditions, and traditions of unknown origins.

Broad fire and emergency services traditions show how firefighting personnel protect the community, structures, and then protect themselves against harm and injury. The fire service tradition is giving of oneself regardless of the hazards that might be faced by that particular firefighter or emergency services personnel. Saving lives and having respect for the tradition of caring for others before their own lives is an established tradition and unwritten code of conduct followed by firefighting personnel. Next, firefighters must maintain a high standard of operational readiness to respond to emergencies. Whether firefighters are wearing protective clothing, maintaining their self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBAs), or maintaining their equipment on the fire apparatus, these areas are imperative to safety and security for all those involved in life-safety measures.

Another area falling under the category of broad fire and emergency services traditions is having pride within the organization. A firefighter is on duty for 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. Once the firefighter puts a uniform on, there is a high level of expectation regarding the pride, dedication, and willingness to
make a positive social change within the organization. Finally, looking out for each other is imperative for the safety and well-being of firefighting personnel. There is a code of ethics that is followed within the context of helping through the "buddy system" and ensuring other fire personnel on the emergency scene will be watched for health and safety issues. Looking out for one another also applies to off-duty time. There are areas of training and development that could be available where the fire department might be able to send groups of personnel to training locations and allow for education, development, and training others within the department once a system has been learned.

Safety is everyone's responsibility on the fire department or in emergency services. Every member of the fire department must accept responsibility for safety and life actions that are taking place on the emergency scene and in the firehouse. The fire department as an entity has a responsibility to the personnel that life safety measures are being followed. It is imperative that chief officers and administrators demonstrate the importance of life safety with firefighting personnel. Tradition is part of the fire service, and will continue to play an integral role in safety standards. One of the "black eyes" that the fire service is dealing is the Line of Duty Deaths (LODD) over the past several years. Life safety and training are a large part of the fire service, however, the continual rise in LODDs have caused a continual concern in life-safety practices in the fire service. Many of the LODDs were been preventable, but one of the areas that causes issues to arise is the unwillingness to change, or deviate from tradition. Changes that relate to personal and organizational accountability might be part of the explanation as to why there is a continual increase in LODDs. Even with the knowledge, training, lessons learned, and the ability to have technology in place at the fire scene, there are still LODDs occurring, even when prevention measures and safety methods could have be in place. Safety is everyone's responsibility. Many departments have commissioners or directors that oversee the large departments, followed by a chief who might assume similar responsibilities to the commissioner, but in smaller departments and locations within the communities. Also included in many departments are deputy chiefs, assistant chiefs, battalion chiefs, safety or training officers, and company officers. They are all important figures in maintaining safety standards while on the scene of an emergency.

Training is a mandatory vehicle to assist all levels of personnel, but primarily it is company officers who learn safety protocols and standards in the fire service. Operational skill levels are developed in the context of the trainings being offered by fire department officers. A good department has a small part of their shift dedicated each day to training and development regarding some aspect of the fire service. The fact remains there is much to be learned regarding life safety in multi-dwellings, industrial settings, business, and home fire-related emergencies. Officers need to be 100% credible and willing to make the cultural change necessary to protect human life on the scene, but also ensure their fire personnel are equipped with the ability to work safely while in unfriendly situations.

The role of NFPA 1500 Standard on Fire Department Occupational Safety and Health program ensures the implementation of safety practices by firefighters, ensures health and safety issues are prioritized on the list of training opportunities, and addresses issues regarding vehicle operations in various types of environmental conditions. In a concerted effort to make a positive social change within the fire service regarding LODDs and overall life safety issues, it is necessary to cease rewarding unnecessary and unsafe practices that have been taking place; to not reward those who are taking unnecessary risks to life safety and health-related issues, but to reward positive practices concerning safe actions during an emergency. Empowerment and ownership are the key
elements to the fire service practicing safe culture and development of proper training practices. In hiring a new recruit, a best practice can be initiated immediately upon entering the fire service between the recruit and the department regarding life safety practices. A partnership can be formed, training provided, so the firefighter's safety practices and work diligence will become an asset to the team and the community.

Reference


Supplemental Reading

Click here to access a PDF of the Chapter 1 Presentation.

Click here to access a PDF of the Chapter 2 Presentation.

Suggested Further Reading

Browse the following websites for topics and resources that interest you:

National Fallen Firefighters Foundation
http://www.firehero.org

National Fire Protection Association
http://www.nfpa.org

U.S. Fire Administration
http://www.usfa.fema.gov

Learning Activities (Non-Graded)

For additional review of the content covered in Unit I, access the http://www.myfirekit.com and complete the Chapter 1 and 2 review activities.

Non-graded Learning Activities are provided to aid students in their course of study. You do not have to submit them. If you have questions contact your instructor for further guidance and information.